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Let's Ban Human Cloning Now

M. Therese Lysaught
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Let's make the world a no-clone zone

Banning the use of cloning to create babies doesn't go far enough, argues ethicist M. Therese Lysaught. Even so-called "therapeutic" or "research" cloning involves the destruction of human embryos and therefore is not only problematic, but also immoral.

ON DEC. 27, 2002, the Raelians finally did it. Or did they? This unusual "religious" group, which believes cloning is our path to immortality, announced this past Christmas that they had succeeded—that "Eve," the world's first cloned baby, had been born.

The Raelians founded the biotech company Clonaid in 1997, after Scottish scientist Ian Wilmut produced the first cloned sheep, with the sole mission to produce a cloned

baby. Since their announcement, they claim others have been born as well. Not surprisingly, however, neither babies nor parents have been made available so these claims can be verified. Many, therefore, believe their claims to be a hoax. But can we be sure?

Earlier last year, on Nov. 7, 2002, the U.S. led a 36-country U.N. coalition that blocked a proposal to ban human cloning. A cursory read of the headlines might have suggested



Margaret Corsello

that the medical-industrial complex had won. Yet this was not the case. The U.S. coalition blocked the ban because it didn't go far enough. The initiative sought only to ban cloning for producing children. The U.S. wants more—a total ban.

The Raelians' claim and this international effort certainly have raised the stakes for the newly Republican-led Senate. Will it join the House of Representatives, which voted in July 2001 to make all human cloning illegal? Or will lawmakers succumb to the pressures, euphemisms, and disinforma-

tion of the pro-cloning lobby that seeks only to outlaw the transfer of cloned embryos to a woman's womb?

We will find out soon. On February 5, six senators re-introduced legislation (S. 303) that would ban human reproductive cloning but would allow cloning for research purposes. I believe they should reject this legislation and instead support the bill that includes a total ban (S. 245). Let's ban all human cloning before it's too late.

Cloning is a laboratory technique used to produce an embryo that is a genetic copy of another organism. It does this "asexually," without using sperm. Cloned embryos could

By M. THERESE LYSAUGHT, assistant professor of religious studies at the University of Dayton. She specializes in biomedical ethics.

be implanted in a woman's womb and brought to term. This is often referred to as "reproductive cloning." Alternatively, the embryos could be used to research how babies develop, to test the effects of various toxins, or to mine them for their stem cells.

Such stem cells could, in theory, be cultured into tissues to be injected back into the cloned person's body as a way of treating a particular disease. Based on this as-yet-remote possibility, this is often called "therapeutic cloning." But since leading scientists warn that turning stem cells into treatments remains decades off at best, a better label is "research cloning."

Clonaid's claims notwithstanding, as of this writing, human cloning has probably not yet occurred—but not for lack of effort. Scientists more mainstream than the Raelians are currently racing to clone human embryos and human babies.

Researchers at Advanced Cell Technology, a biotech company in Massachusetts, announced in November 2001 that they had cloned a human embryo. As with the Raelians, follow-up analysis suggested that their announcement was premature. Researchers overseas have stated that they have cloned human embryos, but no definitive scientific proof has yet been presented. Infertility doctors in the U.S. and Italy are quite candid about their attempts to create cloned babies for infertile couples.

TO BE CLEAR, EVEN MOST ADVOCATES OF RESEARCH CLONING agree that reproductive cloning should be banned. Their arguments are strictly utilitarian. Currently, cloning technology is at a very primitive state. In animals, more than 90 percent of cloning attempts fail to achieve live birth, and live-born cloned animals suffer high rates of deformity and disability. Until these technical difficulties are worked out, the risk of harm to a cloned human is unacceptably high.

Nonetheless, cloning advocates argue, research cloning should proceed. They say that to ban research cloning would be bad for patients, science, and national security. If cloned embryos could provide therapies for diseases that currently find no good treatment—like Parkinson's disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's, or spinal cord injuries—then, their argument goes, we have a moral obligation to pursue it.

In their view, cloning's potential to relieve human suffering outweighs moral concerns about embryonic life. Embryos, they argue, are not persons. Some state that while embryos have value as a form of human life, they lack certain

fundamental characteristics. Embryos also lack rights that would protect them from being seen simply as products or as tools for others' benefit.

Cloning supporters fear that banning research cloning will stymie scientific progress. Science has the right to pursue knowledge and to pursue it freely, they argue. If the Senate limits that freedom in any way, cloning supporters warn that the best and brightest scientific minds in the U.S. will simply leave the country for freer research pastures. This brain drain would imperil U.S. scientific superiority.

What's more, should those countries not shackled by conscience succeed in cloning human embryos, we might well find ourselves at their mercy, dependent on them for therapies we need. Such dependence, they say, is unacceptable.

YET THESE ARGUMENTS COLLAPSE UNDER CLOSER SCRUTINY. The therapeutic claims made on behalf of cloning are far overstated. Our obligation to relieve human suffering also entails the obligation not to increase the suffering of the sick and their families by bolstering false hopes with deceptive promises.

Leading scientists, including those who pioneered embryonic stem cell research, have criticized cloning advocates for hyping the potential benefits of stem cell research and cloning

when the research is at such a primitive stage. Far more animal research is needed before it would be ethical to engage in human experiments. To permit research cloning now would ensure the destruction of thousands upon thousands of human embryos without a single person benefiting.

Moreover, banning cloning would have a negligible impact on the biotech industry. Doomsday scenarios ignore the enormous amount of innovative and truly promising research and development currently underway, especially recent advances in adult stem cell research and other noncontroversial alternatives. This research will not simply stop if human cloning becomes illegal. Those pursuing knowledge will continue to do so creatively, breaking new ground, discovering new ways to treat illness.

And if the U.N. succeeds in banning human cloning, the issue of the "therapeutic" trade imbalance evaporates. Countries that permit cloning would have to accept rogue status before their global peers, a cost likely too high to pay for the

Cloning creates human life only for use by others and creates a new class of human beings specifically destined only for destruction. Because of this, church teaching has roundly condemned it.

Advance copies of *Sounding Board* are mailed to a sample of U.S. CATHOLIC subscribers. Their answers to questions on the topic of this *Sounding Board* article and a representative selection of their comments follow in *Feedback*.

meager benefits cloning might theoretically produce.

Research cloning would not remain research cloning. Once researchers clone a human embryo, cloning will be impossible to regulate. The technique will without question be used by those who wish to use it for reproduction. How simple would it be to quietly slip a cloned embryo into a woman's womb? How could one tell whether a baby in its mother's arms is a clone?

This is not the slippery slope argument. This is how technologies work in a market environment. Technologies are approved for one purpose and then get used for another. Re-

search cloning will open the door for reproductive cloning, and there will be no going back.

Finally, research cloning would require large-scale destruction of human embryos. Inordinate numbers of embryos would need to be created and destroyed to figure out how to get cloning to work. Researchers propose using large batches of embryos to test toxins.

For "therapeutic" cloning, dozens of embryos would need to be created and destroyed for each person treated. Importantly, this process would be exorbitantly expensive, making it a "treatment" option only for the richest.

Feedback

Q: My greatest fear about cloning is...

Use of the process by unscrupulous persons or groups for their own profit or for evil purposes.

*Patricia M. Laux
Neenah, Wis.*

We will not accept people who are not physically and mentally perfect.

*Bill Westerman
Muskegon, Mich.*

All the babies (some call them "embryos") that die in the process.

*Betsy Dalton
Summerville, S.C.*

We will end up with a master race that will take over the world and do away with us inferior beings who got here the old-fashioned way.

*Mary Joyce Downing
Coldspring, Texas*

If banned, it will be done behind closed doors instead of openly by reputable scientists.

*Name withheld
Freeport, Ill.*

Like anything else, only people with the most money would benefit.

*Florence Alestra
Staten Island, N.Y.*

That it would result in a uniformization of the human race and consequently a serious

reduction in its creativity and diversity.

*Robert Kress
Louisville, Ky.*

What if "evil" people are cloned?

*Name withheld
East Quogue, N.Y.*

Selective use of personal traits for the benefit of the state. Hitler would have loved this!

*Edward V. Grace
Wilmington, N.C.*

A sudden growth of mutants with untold consequences.

*Patrick McGarvey
Mays Landing, N.J.*

That infertile couples desperate to have children will be bilked out of their savings with little chance of having a healthy child.

*Diane Vanner Steinberg
Trenton, N.J.*

Once we begin to define some lives as "useful for" instead of intrinsically human, we open the door to genocide and other forms of murder.

*Kathleen O'Bryan
Prairie Village, Kan.*

Q: My faith teaches me about cloning that...

God is the *only* true creator.

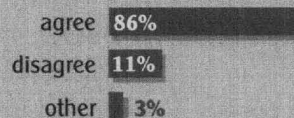
*Larry Chavez
Pueblo, Colo.*

Life begins at conception, so to use embryos

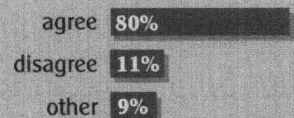


AND THE SURVEY SAYS...

1. I think that all human cloning—both reproductive and research cloning—should be banned.



2. Even if someone I loved were dying from a disease that could be helped by research cloning, I still wouldn't support it.



Representative of other: "I don't really know what I'd do. I would hope to make the right choice," says George Parker of Philadelphia.

Research cloning therefore cannot but affect how we view human life. It is the ultimate step in dehumanizing human life. It creates human life only for use by others and creates a new class of human beings specifically destined only for destruction. Because of this, church teaching has roundly condemned research cloning.

Catholics should not be silenced by the arguments for research cloning. Through its extensive network of Catholic hospitals and health care institutions, the church embodies every day in an unassailable way Jesus' concern for the sick and the Christian belief that God is a God who heals. Unlike

the biotech industry, Christian institutions heal and care for the sick without exorbitant profit, an important point often lost in these discussions (one must always remember to follow the money).

But Christians also believe that our obligation to relieve human suffering cannot become an idol to which all things, including human life, are sacrificed. For practicing Christians, the moral course of action is often more complicated, arduous, and less convenient and requires practicing the virtues of compassion, hope, and above all, patience. **USC**

for research is nothing short of murder.

*Wendy Campos
Vancouver, Wash.*

We are made in the image and likeness of our Creator. We are not made in the image of a petri dish.

*Msgr. Francis A. Murphy
Cuba, N.M.*

Morally complex issues demand thoughtful, prayerful discussion.

*Name withheld
St. Paul, Minn.*

Creation has to include the male and female as a source of providing cells for generation of life (the Blessed Virgin Mary excluded).

*Ernest B. Jaramillo
Hayward, Calif.*

We should alleviate the suffering of others and be healers. If life is sacred, we should support these efforts to heal and make life better and healthier.

*John Horejsi
Vienna, Va.*

Cloning is man's attempt to become as powerful as God, just like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

*Rita F. Renner
Freeburg, Ill.*

God put humankind on the path toward ever greater understanding of life. We have not been created to ignore knowledge, nor to fear it.

*Timothy Strattner
Milwaukee, Wis.*

3. Among the arguments for research cloning, I find the following have some merit. (May check more than one)

- 38%** We have a duty to relieve human suffering.
- 16%** A ban would stymie scientific research.
- 7%** Embryos are not fully human; therefore it's OK if they are destroyed in the process of cloning.
- 55%** None of the above.
- 5%** Other.

4. No matter how badly you might want a child, no one should ever clone a child in their own image.

agree **94%**
disagree **5%**
other **1%**

These results are based on survey responses from 181 U.S. CATHOLIC readers and Web site visitors.

It is less my faith than my common sense that tells me reproductive cloning is a mistake.

*Name withheld
St. Louis, Mo.*

Q: *I think cloned humans would face the following difficulties . . .*

Having to live under the impressions of others that they are superior humans, or perhaps inferior humans.

*Keith E. Johnson
Phoenix, Ariz.*

Rather than eliminating illness, the use of clones would perpetuate genetic illnesses that we are not aware we are carrying.

*Denise Perry
St. Johnsbury, Vt.*

A terrible feeling of not being a unique person.

*Name withheld
North Port, N.Y.*

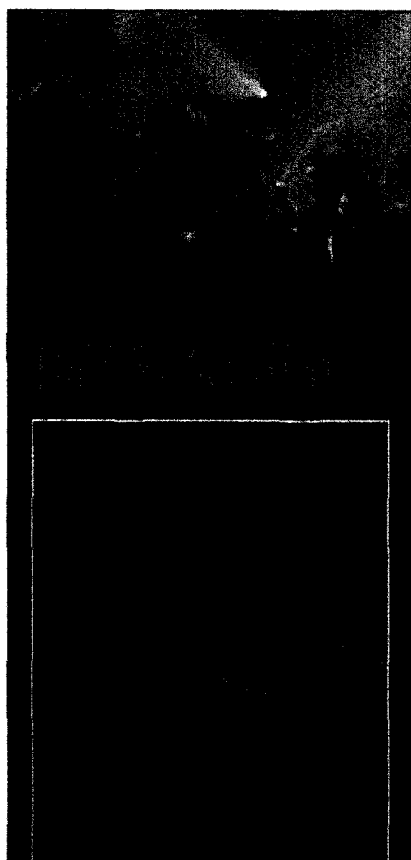
They would be considered nonhumans and be treated as slaves, for spare parts, or used as war pawns.

*Bruce Frame
Coon Rapids, Minn.*

Health problems and questions of their own identity and worth.

*Leila Dornak
Oakland, Texas*

After the novelty wore off, I don't believe they would face any societal problems.



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Louise Brown (the first baby born using in vitro fertilization) lives quietly in England, but remember the brouhaha when she was first born?

*Christine Stark Purcell
Coolville, Ohio*

The same medical problems inbreeding causes.

*Gerard A. Scanlan
New City, N.Y.*

I wonder if a cloned human being would truly ever be as we are—with a soul and essence of life as God gives it?

*Name withheld
South Beach, Ore.*

As shown with the cloned sheep Dolly, clones' processes of aging are abnormal.

*Ben Austin
Macon, Ga.*

Among the unintended consequences is that the world would be overpopulated by males and short on females.

*Bill Cahill
Wheaton, Ill.*

General Comments

As a person living with multiple sclerosis, the thought of benefiting medically from the destruction of other human lives disgusts me.

*Marcia Krivus
Batavia, Ill.*

We should develop a morality for cloning and not just run away scared.

*Eileen McGlone
Lehigh, Penn.*

Reproductive and therapeutic cloning are separate issues, and combining them made it difficult to respond to this survey.

*Joseph D. Cole
Louisville, Ky.*

Until society comes to terms with all the ramifications of cloning (and I believe it never will), it would be irresponsible to open this Pandora's box. We won't be able to put the toothpaste back in the tube.

*Terri Brzezinski
Downers Grove, Ill.*

One thing all this technology misses is the greatness of humanity that comes about by those who are suffering and dying. I am not advocating suffering, but our faith teaches that it is in dying that we have eternal life.

*Father Dennis F. Voss
St. Libory, Ill.*

In my view, a clone would not have human status. By definition a human being is a unique individual—with its own unique personality, soul, and physical identity. Even identical twins are not carbon copies of each other.

*James Steinbach
Peachtree City, Ga.*

Children created without love do not thrive. Desperation does not count as love.

*Mary Jo Sorenson
Woodbridge, Va.*

Reproductive cloning could be motivated by a desire to give life to a new human person and to nurture that person out of unselfish love. But at this stage of development of the science of human cloning, it would be irresponsible and immoral to attempt it.

*Name withheld
Oakland, N.J.*

So who's great enough to be cloned? If God wanted another of me, he would have made one . . . and I am an identical twin!

*Judy Spencer
Nunica, Mich.*

A greater effort ought to be made to take care of needy people who already exist.

*Felicia Perna
Massapequa, N.Y.*

Science is never stopped, so I believe the discussion is moot.

*Phil Giuntoli
Palatine, Ill.*

Join the conversation—
online. In addition to a sample of subscribers, all are invited to respond to U.S. CATHOLIC's monthly Sounding Board survey at www.uscatholic.org. This month, join the discussion about immigration issues.